



El Dorado County Fire Chiefs Association

*Opportunities for Interagency
Collaboration*

2022 – 2023

Background:

- The Municipal Service Reviews (MSR's) were completed during 2021-22, by South Fork Consulting at the direction of LAFCO.
- One of the recommendations from the consultants was to host a “Fire Summit.” The goal of the summit was to discuss fire protection for the County and to look for opportunities to create a sustainable model, while enhancing levels of service.
- The FCA met with LAFCO's ad-hoc committee to seek direction on the Fire Summit and requested the FCA address the issue for presentation back to the committee.

Identified Challenges Facing El Dorado County's Fire Districts:

- **Ad Valorem Tax Rates vary significantly** across individual districts and the County
- Established **tax rates are generally insufficient** to support and maintain today's modern career fire service
- **Most of the Volunteer Firefighter programs have been eliminated** due to the inability to keep Volunteer Firefighters trained to more restrictive and legally mandated minimum training standards/requirements
- The **General Plan** for El Dorado County has **limited growth in large areas of the County**. The impact of the lack of growth is very little new revenue streams to support a modern fire department

Identified Challenges Facing El Dorado County's Fire Districts:

- **Lack of voter support for increased tax** measures to fund fire districts
- **Increasing operational costs:**
 - Salary and benefits
 - Apparatus and equipment
 - Fuel, repair costs, and utilities
 - Facilities
- **Shortage of labor** – reduced applications for new Firefighter positions
- **Proximity to Sacramento Valley and Bay Area** further exacerbates the hiring and retention challenges.

Consolidations, Mergers, Annexations:

- There has been success in the past with some consolidation efforts, El Dorado County Fire (ECF) in '91 ('93 & '94), El Dorado Hills (EDH) with Latrobe (2013), another attempt was made with EDH and Rescue – however after 9 years in process without a successful outcome.
- Other Districts have engaged in conversations, without any movement forward.

Challenges Facing Consolidations:

- **Community Identity.** Many communities view their fire station as a “community hub” and are unwilling to lose their perceived “**local control**” or “identity”
- **Sustainable funding** for success. Bringing two or more districts together, that are challenged financially, doesn’t resolve the challenges. Small(er) districts typically have a small(er) administrative staff which do not impact the operating budget. Creating a larger district would require additional administration to function effectively. Thus, creating a larger district facing the same financial challenges.

Challenges Facing Consolidations:

- **Political Will.** Each of the Fire Districts are governed by elected officials, which creates another challenge of local control and willingness to collaborate with allied agencies.
- Consolidation efforts need meaningful **financial** support from the County for success.
- While districts are independent special districts, a **true partnership** with the County is desperately needed to maintain and recover fire protection service levels in the County.

Opportunities and Ideas:

- Support those currently taking action
 - There are several districts currently engaged in various levels discussions regarding shared services, consolidations, and mergers. If these discussions continue, they will need financial commitment and support from the County. This could yield increased sustainability for some areas.
- Offer Financial Incentives
 - County should **financially incentivize** districts willing to enter into a shared services agreement, annexation, consolidation, contract for service, or merger.

Opportunities and Ideas:

- Form a Fire Authority
 - Operated at either the County level or a lead agency.
 - Discussions included an expansion of CSA-7 to include fire protection.
- Support Contracts for Service
 - Modesto Regional Fire has a successful model that could provide a viable solution in El Dorado County.
- Support Administrative Shared Service Agreements

Opportunities and Ideas (West Slope):

- Merging existing districts into 2, 3, or 4 districts could provide higher efficiency.
 - Re-draw district(s) jurisdictional boundaries and include elected officials for governance
 - Ensure that all assets and liabilities are covered by the newly formed district
 - Ensure sustainability by completing a long-term financial analysis and projections – don't just create a 3- or 5-year solution to this problem
 - Ensure that the County's commitment to financial support must be in **perpetuity**.

Fiscal Accountability:

- Under any of the potential models or concepts discussed, it is **critical** that the elected officials understand their fiduciary responsibility AND have the means to effectively manage costs.
- **Maintaining fiscal awareness** to meet and maintain service delivery and plan for the future.
- Capture opportunities for additional revenue streams.

Questions?

